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Security Council

Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7118th meeting
Tuesday, 25 February 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Murmokaitė	(Lithuania)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Oyarzábal
	Australia	Ms. King
	Chad	Mr. Mangaral
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Jordan	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein
	Luxembourg	Mr. Maes
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nduhungirehe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedures, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: Since the Secretary-General briefed the Council last month (see S/PV.7096), we have seen new and significant developments in relation to the Syrian crisis, with the holding of the much-anticipated second Geneva Conference on Syria and the Security Council's welcome adoption of resolution 2139 (2014), regarding the humanitarian situation. The Secretary-General is committed to making every effort to help advance both of those important initiatives.

On the Middle East peace process, we are nearing a defining moment. United States Secretary of State Kerry's months-long work to address Israeli and Palestinian aspirations and concerns in a fair and balanced manner has opened a credible political horizon for achieving a two-State solution. Any meaningful political initiative must continue to strive towards a comprehensive settlement, and it must address all final status issues in line with the principles outlined in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles — including land for peace — the road map and previous agreements between the parties.

International engagement, which is critical, remains strong. On 1 February in Munich, Quartet principals were briefed on progress in the negotiations. Secretary of State Kerry is continuing his consultations with the leaders over the United States framework proposal, which is meant to serve as a basis for continued negotiations, meeting with President Abbas in Paris on 19 February. We count on the continued support extended to those efforts by regional stakeholders, underlining the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, which is the most viable way for attaining regional peace and yielding socioeconomic and security benefits for all peoples in the Middle East. As the Secretary-General told the Council last month, if the leaders are prepared to take the bold decisions required, he will also push ahead on the positive agenda of peace dividends for both sides.

Ultimately, any genuine intention to pursue peace requires strong leadership. Now is the time for domestic constituencies to put their agendas behind the peace agenda and for the leaders to reach out to their respective publics to raise awareness of the benefits of peace. For Palestinians, a negotiated peace settlement holds the promise of allowing it to become a fully recognized Member State of equal standing. For Israel, only a negotiated two-State solution will bring it the security and recognition it deserves in the region and beyond.

The situation on the ground remains fragile. In the West Bank, Israeli security forces carried out a total of 424 search and arrest operations. A total of 519 Palestinians were arrested, and 218 Palestinians were injured, including during demonstrations against the barrier. Two Israeli soldiers were also injured.

Clashes increased in and around Palestinian refugee camps, most notably in early February in the Al-Arroub and Al-Jalazoun camps, following the killing on 29 January of one Palestinian from the Al-Jalazoun camp near Ramallah and the Ofra settlement after allegedly opening fire at Israeli security forces. More than 30 Palestinian protesters were injured by Israeli live ammunition and rubber-coated metal bullets, while two Israeli soldiers were injured by stone- and Molotov cocktail-throwing.

Israeli security forces reported having foiled several terrorist attacks on Israel allegedly planned by individuals in the West Bank. That included the arrest of an alleged Al-Qaida cell on 22 January and the uncovering of several arms caches. Palestinian security forces, working to maintain order and security, safely defused some unexploded ordnance between 22 January and 3 February and arrested Hizb ut-Tahrir Islamic militants on 8 and 9 February.

Attacks by settlers on Palestinian property included damage to more than 3,000 trees and saplings and some 80 vehicles. On 6 February, three settlers were reportedly charged for setting fire to two vehicles and spray painting stars of David in the Palestinian village of Farata in November. During another attack, on 18 February, the tires of some 30 cars were slashed

and anti-Arab graffiti was painted in the Sharafat neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem. The Israeli police reported the arrest in four operations of more than 10 settlers reportedly involved in attacks on Palestinians or their property. Palestinian stone- and Molotov-cocktail-throwing attacks — on the rise in recent months — resulted in three settlers injured.

The reporting period registered increased funding and incentives by the Israeli Government for existing settlements. Continued settlement activity, including in occupied East Jerusalem, is illegal and erodes hope for the two-State solution by undermining ongoing Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

We are deeply concerned by the ongoing demolition of Palestinian residential and livelihood structures in Area C, particularly in the Jordan Valley and East Jerusalem. A total of 107 structures were demolished, leading to the displacement of 175 Palestinians. Those demolitions must stop and Palestinians must be given access to a fair and inclusive planning regime. We are also increasingly worried by reports of impeded access for the humanitarian community in the delivery of emergency shelter and other assistance. This month, the International Committee of the Red Cross decided to suspend its distribution of tents to people affected by house demolitions in the Jordan Valley, after noting a pattern of obstructions and confiscations of those items by Israeli authorities since the beginning of 2013.

We have reiterated our position on the continued practice of administrative detention by Israel, including of elected Palestinian Legislative Council members, and the six prisoners on hunger strike since January. Administrative detainees must be either charged or released. We are concerned about today's report that a Palestinian prisoner died after he was transferred from an Israeli jail to the hospital. We will continue to follow the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention closely.

Visits by Israeli groups, including senior officials, to the Temple Mount/Al-Haram Al-Sharif resulted in clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli police accompanying those groups. Incitement or provocations from any quarter must cease and the sanctity of holy sites of all faiths must be respected.

Turning to Gaza, there are troubling signs that the ceasefire understanding of November 2012 is eroding in both of its main requirements: the end of hostilities and the opening of the crossing for people and goods. In the past two months, we have seen more rockets being fired at Israel, border incidents and Israeli operations causing death or injury to civilians.

We condemn the increased rocket fire. This reporting period saw the firing of 44 rockets and mortars, of which 15 landed in Israel. Israel conducted six incursions and seven air strikes into Gaza, resulting in the death of two militants and injuries to 10 Palestinians. Israeli forces also reported dismantling an improvised explosive device on the border fence on 18 February. Palestinian activities and protests multiplied in the vicinity of the border fence and were met by increased Israeli live fire, resulting in two Palestinians shot dead and 16 injured. We are deeply concerned about that rise in violence and we call on all parties to act in accordance with international law.

Due to the ongoing closure of Gaza, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) urgently needs an additional $30 million to sustain critical emergency operations in Gaza, without which food aid will be cut back. We call on all donors, including those who have traditionally supported the Agency, to contribute to UNRWA's emergency appeals.

The recent Israeli decision to allow the entry of 1,000 tons of cement and other construction materials for flood relief is positive. However, contrary to expectations, work on United Nations projects is still not back at the level originally agreed by the Israeli authorities, and more than 20 projects remain stalled since November 2013 due to lack of Israeli approval. We continue to call for the Israeli approval of all United Nations projects, and the resumption of already approved projects. We also call for a lifting of restrictions on exports and transfers of goods to the West Bank and Israel, and for permitting the import of construction materials for the private sector. We hope that the Rafah crossing with Egypt will soon resume normal operations.

Meanwhile, efforts to bridge the Palestinian divide continued. Fatah and Hamas delegations met in Gaza to discuss the implementation of existing reconciliation agreements, including the formation of a national consensus Government headed by President Abbas, and the organization of general elections. Ultimately, only the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, under the legitimate Palestinian Authority, based on the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization,

can pave the way for a durable solution for Gaza as part of political progress towards peace. Gaza, too, must reap the peace dividends of a negotiated two-State solution.

Allow me now to turn to the Syrian conflict, whose toll of death and destruction in Syria and in the region continues to mount tragically, pointing urgently to the need for a political solution. After many months of effort, the Secretary-General convened in Montreux, on 22 January, the second Geneva Conference on Syria. More than 40 countries and international organizations participated and underlined their commitment to supporting a political solution to the Syrian conflict. They urged the Syrian sides to negotiate and reach an agreement on the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), as indeed the Council did in its resolution 2118 (2013). As the Council noted in that resolution, the communiqué sets out a number of key steps, beginning with the establishment of a transitional governing body exercising full executive powers, formed by mutual consent.

The first round of intra-Syrian talks began on 23 January and continued for eight days. They included several direct sessions, as well as bilateral meetings with Joint Special Representative Brahimi and his team. The second round of talks took place from 10 to 15 February. Joint Special Representative Brahimi will brief the Council in the coming weeks, so I will therefore not go into specifics. The progress thus far has been limited, confirming the deep rift between the two sides. Yet it is no small feat that those long-awaited negotiations have finally begun, and both sides remain committed to sitting at the table. That is something on which we must try to build.

We are grateful to the Governments of the Russian Federation and the United States, and all in the region and globally, for showing vision and helping to organize that important process. We will continue to need the help of many of the countries who attended the Montreux Conference, as well as some who were not there.

The Council held extensive discussions on the escalating humanitarian toll that the conflict continues to exert on the Syrian people. The Secretary-General wholeheartedly welcomed the Council's adoption of resolution 2139 (2014). We all hope that the resolution will allow all humanitarian actors on the ground to significantly increase their reach to all those in need.

The ongoing hostilities in Syria also continue to impact the vulnerable community of Palestine refugees. The situation is deteriorating in Yarmouk, near Damascus, where 16,000 Palestine refugees remain trapped. While some assistance has reached those in need since 18 January, UNRWA continues to experience sporadic access. We call on all parties to grant UNRWA uninterrupted access to the civilian population of Yarmouk and other civilian areas.

On 10 and 18 February, explosions took place near UNRWA schools in Muzeirib, killing 18 people. We deplore those indiscriminate attacks and remind the warring parties of their obligations under international law to protect all civilians.

The situation in the Golan continues to be of deep concern. Heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition and shelling continued in the area of limitation in proximity to the area of separation. On 18 and 19 February, artillery and mortar fire rounds from the Bravo side landed across the ceasefire line. There was no response from the Alpha side. We are also looking into the reports of an air strike yesterday in the border area between Lebanon and Syria, and we urge all parties to avoid escalation. Those developments have the potential to escalate and to jeopardize the ceasefire between Israel and Syria, as well as to heighten tensions between Lebanon and Israel.

In Lebanon, the formation of a Government of national interest was a major positive development against a backdrop of continued tensions stemming from a spate of deadly terrorist attacks, as well as incidents of shelling and shooting from across the Syrian border into Lebanon.

On 21 January, a suicide bombing in the Haret Hraik suburb of Beirut was claimed by a Lebanese branch of Jabhat Al-Nusra. On 1 February, another Jabhat Al-Nusra suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in Hermel. On 3 February, a suicide attack took place in Choueifat, in south Beirut. On 19 February, a double suicide bombing in the Beirut suburb of Bir Al-Hassan, which targeted the Iranian Cultural Centre, was claimed by the Abdallah Azzam Brigades.

Shelling from Syria targeted Lebanese populated areas in the Bekaa Valley and killed two people in the Akkar region. There were at least two airstrikes by Syrian aircraft in violation of Lebanese sovereignty. In Tripoli, continued fighting between the Alawite

and Sunni communities caused at least five fatalities, including one Lebanese soldier. The Lebanese Armed Forces have had a number of successes in capturing militants wanted in connection with the recent bombings in Beirut and Hermel, and acted to contain the movement of armed men and weapons between Lebanon and Syria.

The Secretary-General congratulated President Sleiman and Prime Minister Salam following the formation, on 15 February, of the Government of national interest under Prime Minister Tamam Salam. The Secretary-General noted that the inclusion of most political parties in the Cabinet was important to address the serious security threats and humanitarian challenges facing the country, and in order to organize the presidential elections on time next month. Members of the new Cabinet are working on agreeing a ministerial statement outlining the Government's agenda.

The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and along the Blue Line remained calm, despite almost daily Israeli air violations of Lebanese airspace. Pursuant to the recommendations of the International Support Group for Lebanon, on 20 February the Lebanese Armed Forces and the United Nations launched a coordination mechanism for international assistance to the army. We welcome France's offer to host a meeting of the International Support Group in Paris on 5 March to support the political process in Lebanon and its State institutions.

In conclusion, allow me to return to the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. It is the United Nations sincere desire to see 2014 as the year that bears witness to a comprehensive settlement realizing the vision of two States for two peoples: Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition of each other's legitimate rights, including self-determination, with each State ensuring equal civil rights for all its citizens. The Middle East region suffers from multiple crises and faultlines that require urgent attention, not least the conflict in Syria and its impact on neighbouring States. But the efforts deployed over the past seven months towards achieving a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, in the form of a negotiated two-State solution, have come closer than at any point in recent time to making a real and much-needed contribution to regional stability. It is therefore in our collective interests, as well as that of both the Israelis and the Palestinians, to invest in the success of that process and ensure that it is credible and just for both parties.

The President: I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.